

WASHINGTON, DC. Congressman Sanford Bishop released the following statement in response to President Bush's State of the Union Address.

"Last November, the American people demanded a dramatic change at home and abroad. Now in the majority, Democrats in Congress are delivering that change by reaching out to Republicans and delivering results on the priorities of the American people. Tonight's speech by the President responded to those demands for changes in domestic policy.

However, before considering any new domestic policies, we must recognize the elephant in the room: the prolongation of the war in Iraq is also a continuation of spending American dollars and, subsequently, an immediate hindrance to meeting our domestic policy goals. Improving health care, education, energy and other programs all come with associated costs that will have to be weighed against the cost of war.

There remain many differences to be worked out on Iraq, not only between Democrats and Republicans but also between the President and Congress. At this time, it is unclear what, if any, action will be taken by Congress. Hopefully, the recent surge in troop levels will be able to produce a measurable outcome such as a reduction in sectarian violence and killing and increased security in Baghdad. But, no matter the result of this most recent surge in troop levels, the actions of Congress should be in the collective interest of national security, the troops and the American people.

Regarding the specifics of the domestic agenda, I wholeheartedly agree that we must solve the nation's health care crisis. However, I am hesitant to endorse a plan that potentially taxes middle class American families. In recent months, Democrats have proposed alternative ways in which universal health care could be achieved without levying a tax on the middle class. As we move forward, it is my hope that we can examine these plans and choose those aspects which minimize any kind of tax while helping the largest group of people possible.

Our dependence on foreign oil has placed a burden on working families, threatened national security and harmed the environment. Last week, in the first 100 Hours, we repealed the subsidies previously given to Big Oil, in hopes of investing those funds in the alternative fuels and technologies needed to help our families, national security, and the future of our planet. It is my hope that the 110th Congress can work with President Bush in a bipartisan fashion to achieve these aims.

Ultimately, the proof is in the pudding: when the President releases his budget during the first week in February, we will truly have a better grasp of the policies laid out this evening. In the meantime, I look forward to getting down to business and stand ready to work with my Congressional colleagues on both sides of the aisle on this ambitious agenda."